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p-Cromie, Alice
p-Royce, Kenneth
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BOOKS today

Reviews by Alice Cromie

Crime on My Hands

◊ MAKING SLOW and profitable waves in the wake of headlines is standard suspense fiction procedure. The reluctant spy-in-the-cold-war theme was a long time in reaching crest and subsiding. Now the newly relaxed attitude toward sex and the unrelaxed split of the under-and-over-30s, with maximum vigilance maintained on both sides, are plot situations still gathering strength. [We can probably expect the first whodunits based on women's lib along with the first robin.]

"Fadeout," by Joseph Hansen [Harper & Row, \$4.95], is the first tale of detection, to my knowledge, in which—with the exception of a few minor characters—only the bad guys are heterosexual. Robert Benchley once wrote about "The Social Life of the Newt," wherein a passionate male salamander was sadly confused by a rubber pencil eraser. You may learn something about the social life of homosexuals in "Fadeout," but won't be confused about much of anything including the disappearance of a heavily insured folk singer or the motives of anyone who is, or definitely is not, looking for him. Hansen has written a sympathetic and for the most part successful, portrayal of a homosexual insurance investigator and his personal losses and gains. He makes him a whole and responsible human being for whom the reader has empathy and of whom he expects a John Ball, who also broke ground with his now wildly successful first-rate performance in detecting. Unfortunately, and unlike Virgil Tibbs, black detective, in "The Heat of the Night," the author has used his best efforts in making Dave Brandstetter a likable and competent detective while leaving the plot as simple as one of the folk songs the missing Fox Olson might have sung. Even so, the book is well-written and is an encouraging introduction to a new brand of detective. We can look forward to the next appearance of Brandstetter, who—by then—can get most of his credentials established in a flash and get on to coping with a more puzzling plot.

◊ "THE XYY MAN," by Kenneth Royce [McKay-Washburn, \$4.95], comprises no new look at sex or international thievery; herein a paroled second-story man is involved by the British in plucking a "damaging" photograph from the vault of the Chinese Legation in London. Altho "Fleet Street," i. e. the London Press, knows that a high official is homosexual, we are asked to believe the photographic proof of his predilection is an item sought by the CIA, the K. G. B. and the Chinese even at deadly length. The whole does smack of a late-night Peter Sellers caper but the pay-off is worth waiting for. Spider Scott, eluding one net after another, finally gets off with grace, a la a onetime Pauline in her greatest peril.

◊ "Killer Boy Was Here," by George Bagby [Crime Club, \$4.50], is a skillful puzzle about who threw a knife into a lissome back as its owner crossed a New York park during the first snow-fall of